

## EPA Official Record

---

**Notes ID:** DEE27233C3789548852577DD00671836

**From:** ElaineT Stanley/R1/USEPA/US

**To:** Dave Dickerson/R1/USEPA/US@EPA; Larry Brill/R1/USEPA/US@EPA; Kimberly White/R1/USEPA/US@EPA; Cynthia Catri/R1/USEPA/US@EPA; David Peterson/R1/USEPA/US@EPA; Jeanethe Falvey/R1/USEPA/US@EPA

**Delivered Date:** 06/29/2010 08:51 AM EDT

**Subject:** Article in Sunday's S-T

The article Paul sent yesterday missed the end of many sentences (at least in my version). Here's the full story.

### New Bedford pushes harbor development forward as EPA cleanup drags on

[Photo 1 of 5](#) | [Zoom Photo +](#)



Harbor clean up dredging is underway in the Acushnet River. Workers on board a hydrolic dredging barge in the upper portion of the Acushnet River.

By **CHARIS ANDERSON**

canderson@s-t.com

June 27, 2010 12:00 AM

•

NEW BEDFORD — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency could implement next year a new technique in the ongoing cleanup of the New Bedford Harbor Superfund site that would shave years off the project time line and potentially save millions of dollars.

The technique, known as a confined aquatic disposal, or CAD, cell, involves burying contaminated sediment in the harbor instead of disposing of it off-site, the current process.

Even with the new technique, however, at current funding levels the project is still expected to take several more decades to complete, a timeline Mayor Scott W. Lang said Friday was unfair to the people of New Bedford.

The city has moved aggressively to revitalize the Upper Harbor waterfront, attracting millions of dollars in investment over the past several years, and has recently brought a rowing program to the city that will get people out on the Acushnet River.

"The approach was: Let's find out what the limitations are and then let's work within the limitations and turn (the harbor) into an asset," he said.

"We are going to continue to work through and around EPA's work, but we're not going to concede in any way that there should be some dead time until they finish their work."

New Bedford Harbor was placed on the EPA's National Priorities List, a compilation of the country's most seriously contaminated sites, in 1983 just a few years after then-President Jimmy Carter signed into law the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act, which established the Superfund program.

Two electrical parts manufacturers — Aerovox, located along the upper harbor, and Cornell-Dubilier, located south of the hurricane barrier — dumped polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, into the harbor from the 1940s into the 1970s.

The PCBs have settled in sediment throughout the harbor, with the contamination generally at its most severe north of the Coggeshall Street bridge.

Since the harbor was first named a Superfund site, about 193,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment has been removed, according to the EPA.

Hot spots that contained concentrations of PCBs in excess of 4,000 parts-per-million were remediated — the sediment dredged from the harbor and later disposed of at an out-of-state landfill — in the mid-1990s, according to project information on the EPA website.

Full-scale hydraulic dredging started in 2004 and has continued annually based on available funding, according to David Dickerson, an EPA co-project manager for the site.

In hydraulic dredging, an agitator is stuck down into the mud and sucks in sediment and water as if through a giant industrial vacuum cleaner, according to Dickerson.

This material is pumped through a pipe to a de-sanding facility on Sawyer Street, where coarse-grade material is removed. The remaining sediment is then transmitted through a pipe in the harbor to a de-watering plant on Hervey Tichon Avenue, where it is squeezed through filter plates, according to Paul L'Heureux, the project's Army Corps of Engineers construction manager.

The water pressed from the sediment is treated, and the remaining sediment — which has been compressed into what's known as a filter cake — is loaded onto rail cars and ultimately shipped to a disposal facility in Michigan.

The project has typically received just \$15 million a year, which allows for about two months of dredging a year. In 2009, the site received about \$30 million in stimulus money, which allowed for an extended dredging season last year and will prolong the season again this year, according to Dickerson.

But even that extended season will only remove about 50,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment, a fraction of the approximately 700,000 cubic yards that remains to be addressed, according to the EPA.

If the project continues to be funded at \$15 million a year, it will take about 46 years to complete, according to Dickerson, while at \$30 million a year, it will take about 40 years.

If the project funding remains at the lowest level, the cost to complete it would be about \$1.7 billion, according to Dickerson.

(The timeline and cost estimates include a remedial technique, known as a confined disposal facility or CDF, that is not being used, but remains in the cleanup plan. Until the technique is deleted from the cleanup plan, it must be factored into all estimates. Dickerson said the estimates would likely be lower if the CDF technique were excluded.)

A CAD cell — an excavation in the harbor floor into which contaminated sediment is dumped and then covered with clean fill — is one way to expedite the project timeline, according to Dickerson.

The EPA last week released a draft plan to implement a CAD cell that would be used to remediate sediment located primarily south of the Coggeshall Street bridge, in the direction of the Fairhaven Bridge.

The cell could be excavated in 2011, the sediment dredged and placed in the cell over the following two years and then the cell capped in 2014, said Dickerson.

"If we can clean up those smattering of areas south of Coggeshall in the lower harbor, then we can put the check mark — done — as to the lower harbor," he said.

According to Dickerson, CAD cells have been used in Providence, Boston and even New Bedford as part of an ongoing navigational dredging effort that is dealing with sediment contaminated with PCBs but not at levels high enough to trigger EPA involvement.

"It's a tool that's always been in the toolbox," he said.

"We have a very good example from the work the city has done to date in the lower harbor ... of where this has worked for non-Superfund material, and we want to show it can work for Superfund material as well."

A 30-day public comment period on the plan, known as an explanation of significant difference (ESD), started Friday. Once the comment period closes, the EPA will review and respond to comments and then — assuming there is consensus on a CAD cell as an appropriate remedial technique — the ESD will be signed and become part of the cleanup plan, said Dickerson.

Using a CAD cell would knock about six years off the project schedule at a \$15 million-a-year level, while it reduces the time to complete by 14 years at the \$30 million-a-year level. At both funding levels, a CAD cell would reduce the completion costs by about \$500 million, according to Dickerson.

Ideally, said Dickerson, the CAD cell work will proceed in parallel with continued hydraulic dredging in the upper harbor, but whether the ideal becomes reality all depends on funding.

"At \$15 million, the answer is probably no," he said. "We may have to make a tough choice and do one or the other ... but we haven't even started to debate that question."

In recent years, Congress has been funding the Superfund program at about \$1.3 billion a year, down from a high of about \$1.6 billion, according to Katherine Probst, a senior fellow with Resources For The Future, a nonprofit independent think tank in Washington D.C.

Of that appropriation, only about half goes to remedial, or cleanup, actions, said Probst.

New Bedford Harbor was just one of 1,111 non-federal sites — of which 416, including the harbor, still needed some type of physical construction activities — on the National Priorities List (NPL) at the end of fiscal 2009, according to a recent report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

According to Probst, sites are still being added to the NPL.

Awarding New Bedford Harbor \$80 million a year would allow the cleanup to proceed in the most expeditious manner possible, she said, but would also mean holding up or delaying progress at other sites.

Mayor Lang said he is dead set against the timeline that's been established under the current funding levels.

"We are going to continue to push very hard with the congressional delegation to accelerate the timeline," he said.

"The government owes it to the people of New Bedford that that timeline be moved in a significant manner ... This environmental project should be a priority for the federal government, and we are allocated just a pittance of money."

Frustrated though Lang is with the pace of the cleanup, he said it has not proven to be an obstacle in the city's plan to revitalize the upper harbor area and to reconnect city residents with the water.

Lang admits the Superfund label can create a perception issue that needs to be overcome.

"Certainly at first blush, you hear that it's a Superfund site, you certainly start to develop this image in your mind that it's something that can't be worked with," he said.

"The first breakthrough was having people understand that it was not the death knell of development on the water."

Over the past several years, the city has been able to attract millions of dollars in investment in the upper harbor area, said New Bedford Economic Development Council Executive Director Matthew Morrissey, who pointed to projects such as the Riverside Landing retail development and Victoria Riverside Townhouse Lofts mill redevelopment.

"The harbor has been dirty as long as I've been alive. There's no secret about that," he said. "But do we just turn our back on it? Or do we look for opportunity to maximize its potential?"

The city has developed a plan for the upper harbor district, which helps market the area to investors, and is also working hard on projects to reconnect residents to the water, whether through a planned riverwalk or by bringing a

rowing program into the city, said Morrissey.

(The city has applied to the Harbor Trustee Council for funding for the riverwalk and is awaiting a decision.)

Michael DeVos, who with his partner, Bart Bussink, recently purchased Cliftex North, said he was initially concerned about the contamination in the harbor, but conversations with the EPA and the city were able to allay those concerns.

"As developers this is not really unusual, and there's a program in place to take care of it," he said.

Steve Ricciardi, the developer behind Victoria Riverside and The Lofts at Wamsutta Place, agreed.

"It's very hard to find virgin land anywhere," he said.

Certainly some land has been abused more than others, but the contamination in the harbor is being remediated, he said.

"Certainly, we'd all love to see it cleaned faster," said Ricciardi.

But, he said, "It doesn't bother us at all."